# ASSESSMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF THE USER IN REGULATORY ACTS GOVERNING LIBRARIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

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**Abstract.** One of the main structural elements of the library system is its users. The library collection and the services provided are based on providing users with prompt services. Therefore, it is important to design services based on user characteristics. It should be noted that terms such as 'reader,' 'customer,' 'member,' 'subscriber,' and "client" are widely used to describe the concept of 'user.' Currently, the functions of the traditional concept of 'reader' have changed significantly. Along with those who use the library, potential users are also considered users. The language used in connection with any process, the form of expression presented, and the expressions used shape perceptions and views. From this point of view, the form of naming library users is of great importance in terms of defining users' points of view. The aim of this study is to examine the concept of 'user' and other related concepts and approaches to them in the main legislative documents of university libraries in Azerbaijan, as well as in library statutes and instructions. Document and data analysis using a descriptive method was widely used to collect data for the study.

User definitions have emerged, and overall, comprehensive attention has been paid to the concepts of 'user,' 'participant,' 'reader,' 'university,' and 'student.' It was established that in the context of the modern approach, the concept of 'reader' is mainly defined as 'user,' and various expressions related to this term were also found. In general, definitions related to the user vary in form and expression. It is important for academic libraries to get to know their readers better and, accordingly, to serve them based on modern standards, especially by developing this topic from the users' point of view. It is believed that the results obtained can provide valuable information about the concept and perspectives of users in higher education libraries in Azerbaijan.

**Key words**: library as a social institution, information users, librarians, library science in Azerbaijan.

**Introduction.** In the 21st century, libraries are undergoing significant ideological changes. Nowadays, libraries are increasingly user-oriented. Whereas previously libraries focused mainly on meeting user needs, now users are at the center of all library services and processes, becoming active participants. In modern times, users are no longer passive participants in this service, using information services. In the changing pace of the 21st century, users have become an active part of any product or service. Historically, based on the results of genetic analysis, librarians around the world have concluded that a library consists of four elements: documents (books and other publications, including electronic media), readers (users), librarians, and material and technical resources. Without these elements, the existence and functioning of any library is impossible.

The founder of library science in Azerbaijan, prominent scientist and professor Abuzar Khalafov, in his scientific work "Introduction to Library Science" (Khalafov A. 2001) noted the important contribution of many outstanding scientists, especially American scientist D. J. Shira and prominent Russian librarian Y. N. Stolyarov, in defining the basic elements of a library, and gave a broad explanation of their scientific approaches to this issue. For example, J. Shira presented the structure of a library in the form of a triangle and said that its basis is the document, the reader and the librarian, while Y. N. Stolyarov suggested that it is a quadrangle – the document, the reader, the librarian and the material and technical base. Currently, modern scientific literature on library science notes that the structure of libraries mainly consists of five elements: buildings, finances, personnel, collections,

and readers (users). Among these elements, it is the users who play an important role in shaping the library collection, which is the basis for the existence of libraries, in determining service categories and in planning.

In this sense, researcher E. Yilmaz (2005, p. 2) identified users as the first of five key elements that make up library systems. Renowned Indian scholar R. Ranganathan expressed his views on the role of users in librarianship in his book "The Five Laws of Librarianship" as follows: "...you should not impose your own thoughts on them... Unfortunately, we are all human beings, and in trying to prove ourselves right, we forget our real goal – to help the user find what he or she needs. You can guide them, but you cannot drag them along with you" (Ranganathan, 1963).

It should be noted that users, whose needs must be met, constitute the main target audience of the library. From this point of view, it became necessary to study users, determine their reading characteristics and analyse their needs. Currently, scientific research such as studying user needs for information services, determining the type of information, the relevance of existing services to modern needs, and developing optimal services in accordance with the tasks set, is defined as fundamental user research (Prytherch, 2000).

**Metodology.** It should be noted that users' information needs may vary and change depending on time and place. It should be borne in mind that in a changing world, information needs also change very quickly. If the category of library users is not the subject of research, it is impossible to predict the future activities of libraries.

The study used a descriptive method, as well as methods for collecting relevant information on the topic and scientific analysis of the information obtained.

**Results and their discussion.** In the dictionary, it is defined as "a user is a person who controls something or benefits from something." This term, used by specialists in various fields, has different meanings, areas of application, purposes and functions. A user is a person who uses the library's information resources for various purposes. This can be an individual, a group, etc. Considering the concept of a user as a term, we observe its use in various fields of science. In particular, this term has found wide application in the field of computer science as a suitable equivalent to the word user, which is translated from English as "user". In librarianship, the concept of 'user' has historically been used in various forms and expressed as "reader," "researcher," "client," "member", etc. It should be emphasized that in this area, such well-known scholars as Jennifer Rowley, Heidi Julien, Michael Gorman, B. T. Lallo, and others have attempted to identify alternative terms to "reader" in their research.

Among the concepts mentioned, the term "reader", which is traditional, has over time gone beyond its narrow interpretation and needed to be replaced by the term "user". As a result, people who use the library have been replaced by the concept of 'user' as a result of the transformation of the traditional concept of 'reader' caused by information technology (Özlük, 2006, p. 106).

Various sources in the field of librarianship have proposed different scientific approaches to the concept of a user. For example, researcher Yılmaz (2005, 1) defined the concept of a user in a general sense as "persons who benefit or are likely to benefit from information services". The definition states that, in addition to persons who probably use the library, it also includes persons who actually use it. In addition, Uçak (1997b, p. 20) in his scientific study "The behavior of scientists when searching for information and the reasons influencing it" determined that the concept of a user is not limited to persons who actively use information centers, but includes "all active and potential persons to whom information centers are obliged to provide services". Here, in addition to those who actively and specifically use the library, potential individuals who do not currently use the library but may use it at any time and in any form in the future should also be taken into account. Cribb, taking into account that people come to the library not only to read but also for various purposes, defined the user as follows:

1. For the use of auxiliary resources;

2. To obtain library resources;

3. For consultation with the librarian;

4. For copying library resources by photocopying;

5. For the use of video and audio documents;

6. For the use of other services offered by the library.

Consequently, a person who visits a library is not a "reader" but a "user" [Cribb, G. (1981).

The concept of "reader" in the initial approach was also clearly reflected in the following explanation by Professor A.A. Khalafov. In his monograph "Library and Society", A. Khalafov explained that the word "reader" comes from the word "reading" and means "a person registered with a library, a member of a library, a person who uses a library" (Khalafov , A. 2011)

In another approach, Professor A.A. Khalafov notes: "In our opinion, users who visit the library by chance, only when they need to, are not readers. The word "reader" itself is understood as an intellectual, a person who loves books and knows how to appreciate them" (Khalafov, A. 2011). Thus, "the dictionary meaning of the term "reader" is a person who reads books and all kinds of printed material" (Khalafov, A. 2011, p. 9).

The above reasons show once again that it is more appropriate to develop the concept of a user rather than a reader.

*Library users and their characteristics*

Naturally, the fact that libraries of different typologies have their own user groups allows users to be classified differently. In addition, users can be classified in a general context. Ginchat and Menou (1990, p. 291) based their classification of user types on two criteria:

1. Objective criteria, such as the user's profession and area of expertise;

2. Social-psychological criteria, such as the user's approach and behaviour towards information and its search. Guinchat, C. and Menou, M. (1990).

The above criteria largely coincide with the reasons that influence information search. As a result, information demand generates information search, which in turn turns a person into an information user. In accordance with these criteria, various categories of information are distinguished:

1. Users who do not actively participate in economic life (students, etc.).

2. Those who need information related to their field of activity (production, management, services).

3. By field of activity or specialization (public administration, agriculture, industry, etc.)

4. Ordinary people who need information on general and social issues (Guinchat and Menou. 1990).

Lallo (2002, pp. 25–26) grouped users according to their work, the system in which they work, and other people. For example, by profession–civil servants, students, researchers, politicians, etc.; by the system in which they work: government agencies, scientific, cultural and religious organizations, industrial enterprises, etc.; other professional and non-professional individuals.

The user grouping proposed by Lallo is broader and covers most of society, including not only those who use the library, but also potential users who are likely to use it in the future. Users can also be grouped according to various criteria, such as age categories – children, young people, the elderly, people with visual impairments, etc.

Performing both research and educational functions, universities rank first among institutions that are fundamental to the scientific development of countries. University libraries also play an important role in this area. Each library provides services in accordance with the needs of its audience. It is more appropriate to identify individuals and organization that will use the services of the university library from a scientific point of view, or, accordingly, as users of the university library. Users of the university library can be grouped as follows:

– University students, lecturers, and staff of educational institutions.

– Administrative staff.

– Users of other library services.

– Independent researchers (only those who have permission to use library resources and library services based on membership).

Users of university libraries include registered students, staff, independent researchers, and guest users from other universities. In addition, students participating in bilateral agreements within national and international student exchange programmers, visiting researchers, etc. are also considered university users.

The user – one of the most important components of library activity or information business. This article presents alternative definitions of the term "user," their explanations, and various aspects.

Each reader has his own unique style of behavior, which is directly influenced by the surrounding society, cultural environment, values, demographic and geographical conditions. These factors, in turn, affect the process of searching for information by the user. From this point of view, specialists in the library and information field should plan and take into account various products and services for users. Considering that the main purpose of the services or products provided in the library is to meet the changing and rapidly growing needs of users, it can be understood that the quality of user service and products depends on a thorough study of their characteristics.

**Conclusions and recommendations.** One of the major problems facing libraries today is the lack of users, due to which, in this era of rapid development of information and communication technologies, many people are no longer visiting libraries. This problem can be solved by paying due attention to users, understanding their importance and appreciating them. Thus, considering that users are people who benefit from any products and services, their opinion about these services and products will allow them to be more closely connected with libraries.

– The concept of "user" includes such concepts as "user", "'member", and "external user".

– İn general, the concept of "user" is usually divided into four categories: "benefit-oriented user", "legislation-oriented user", "university-oriented user" and "member-oriented user"

-Currently, the term "user" is more commonly used to refer to the category of readers. However, alongside this concept, there are also traditional concepts such as "reader," "researcher", and "consumer".

– the terms "user" are largely synonymous with each other, in addition to their general and limited meanings, they also have a very broad meaning

İn general, it can be stated that there is no limit to the standardized and unified approach to reader management, which is reflected in the statutes and instructions of academic libraries in Azerbaijan. From this point of view, it is advisable to put forward the following proposals:

– It is necessary to strive for the widespread dissemination of experience in working with users, based on modern approaches. In this regard, studying the relationship between university library management and users may yield more useful results;

– It is important to take certain steps to transform activities such as "reader service" in university libraries into 'user observation;

– Improving the quality and quantity of user-oriented research can lead to greater awareness of this issue;

– At the same time, organizing courses and training in this area can yield more positive results;

– To recognize users and emphasize their importance, professional scientific events on the topic of "Users and research of users"" can be organized.

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